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TAGS: [IZ](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#)

SUBJECT: MALIKI'S GROWING WILLINGNESS TO TAKE ON JAM

REF: A. BASRAH 2

[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 4754

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (S) SUMMARY: PM Maliki is increasingly willing to allow targeted military action against elements of Moqtada al-Sadr's Jaish al-Mahdi militia and other Sadr organizations involved in illegal activities, even in his Sadr City stronghold. Evidence for this shift can be seen in the increased number of JAM-linked security detainees being held by coalition forces since this past summer. This change seems to reflect the failure of Maliki's efforts to bring radical Shia cleric and JAM leader Moqtada al-Sadr into the political mainstream, as well as his increasing understanding and sense of responsibility for security in the country. END SUMMARY

[1](#)2. (S) Throughout the summer of 2006, Maliki argued that Coalition operations against JAM would undermine his efforts to bring Moqtada al-Sadr into the political process. His patient efforts to tame Sadr have borne few results. Indeed, with the suspension of their participation in the government following the Bush-Maliki meeting in Amman and their demand that the government renounce the UN Security Council Resolution extending MNF-I's mandate, Sadrists politicians seem to be distancing themselves from the political process. The Prime Minister told the Ambassador a few weeks ago that he had exhausted efforts to get Moqtada to reign in the JAM and distance himself from their violent actions.

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A NOTICEABLE CHANGE  
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[1](#)3. (S) PM Maliki is increasingly willing to authorize military action against members of JAM and other Sadr organizations that have demonstrable links to illegal activities. He has pre-approved a list of High Value Targets in Sadr City and approved operations against those linked to EFP and IDF attacks, as well as those who might have information on the kidnapped American soldier. Examples include:

-- Maliki approved a December 31 raid in Sadr City conducted by Iraqi Security Forces with Coalition advisors that resulted in the detention of a high ranking individual linked to a "killing cell." The cell was linked to extra-judicial killings and was also thought to have information about the kidnapped U.S. soldier.

-- Maliki authorized the December 25 raid by Iraqi and British forces on the headquarters of the JAM-infested Basrah

Police Serious Crime Unit (ref A). The unit had been linked to torture and death squad activities.

-- Maliki approved Operation Black Hole, targeting a JAM brigade commander in charge of several Sadr City-based death squads. The JAM commander has also been linked to Improvised Explosive Attacks against Coalition forces and Indirect Fire (rocket and mortars) attacks against Sunni neighborhoods.

These are important steps, especially when compared with Maliki's attitude as recently as late October -- when he complained loudly about Coalition efforts in Sadr City to locate the kidnapped U.S. soldier and had checkpoints in the area removed.

¶4. (S) This increased operational tempo against JAM is reflected in detention statistics. The number of JAM-linked detainees being held by coalition forces has risen from approximately 100 in the spring of 2006 to a current number of 539. Iraqi Shias now account for almost 10 percent of the security detainee population, up from five percent eight or nine months ago. According to the detainees operations task force led by Major General Gardner, Prime Minister Maliki's office has rarely (three or four times) tried to intervene to have a Shia detainee released.

¶5. (S) In addition to military operations, Maliki has recently taken steps to reduce the corrosive influence of militia infiltration in government ministries, forming and tasking a ministerial committee with security ministry reform. Maliki is also examining options for dealing with the Ministry of Health's militia-controlled Facility Protection Service.

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POLITICAL OUTREACH FAILS; MALIKI TAKES OWNERSHIP OF SECURITY  
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¶6. (S) Other factors may play into Maliki's shift, including increasingly close senior-level operational coordination between MNF-I and Iraqi leaders and evidence that the U.S. is taking seriously Maliki's desire for a speedy transfer of security responsibility -- both of which give him more "ownership" of the issue. It is worth noting that Iraqi Security Forces -- particularly Iraqi Special Operations Forces (ISOF) -- have been in the lead during recent Sadr City operations. Increasing evidence of Shia militia links to outside forces -- such as the recent detention of Iranian intelligence officials at a SCIRI/Badr compound -- may be also shaping Maliki's thinking on the need to more aggressively tackle unlawful militia activity.  
KHALILZAD